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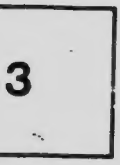

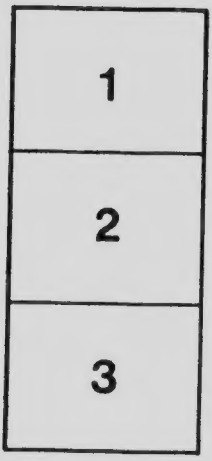

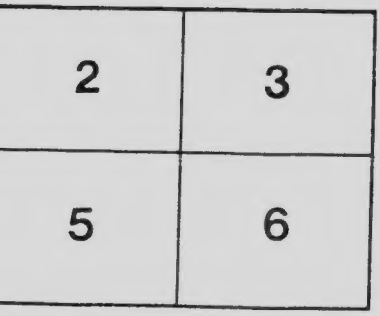

PROVINCE OF ALBERTA
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SUGGESTIONS RE WINTERING BROOD SOWS

By W. F. Stevens, Live Stock Commissioner.

INTRODUCTION

The life of the average hog intended for market is divided into four periods:

1. The Pre-Natal Period.
2. The Sucking Period.
3. The Growing Period.
4. The Finishing or Fattening Period.

The successful swine grower must know the feeds and methods of handling best adapted to each period and then do what he knows should be done.

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This Letter Deals With the First Period Only.

The objects to be attained during the first period are to provide the unborn animal with sufficient strength of bone, muscle and sinew to enable it to successfully pass from the period during which it is nourished directly by the blood of the mother into that period when it is kept alive by the food taken into its own digestive organs, also to supply it with that nervous energy which insures alertness and makes it quick to see danger and prompt to avoid it.

Fat is not necessary, nor will it take the place of any of the requisites mentioned; but on the contrary, it is very likely to have a detrimental effect by reducing the nervous energy and making the animal too sluggish to properly take care of itself in the nest. This accounts for the fact that the pig that gets laid on and smothered is nearly always the largest and fattest in the bunch.

There is no grain grown in Alberta that supplies the bone and muscle necessary to young pigs to a greater degree than does oats, and there is no forage crop superior to alfalfa.

Where alfalfa is supplied, either green or cured, barley and wheat may safely constitute half of the grain ration, but in the absence of alfalfa, barley and wheat should be used very sparingly, or better still, not at all.

Salt.—Brood sows should have constant access to salt, or it should be kept away from them entirely.

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Swine may be successfully grown without salt, but if brood sows have acquired a taste for it, then have been without it for some time, and particularly if they have been prevented from getting fresh earth, care should be exercised to see that they do not have free access to salt later on, especially while in pig. There is good reason to believe that litters have been lost by the dam eating too much salt.

It is a good practice to keep a box containing eight parts wood ashes, four parts air-slacked lime and one part salt where the sows have access to it all the time.

A pile of coal slack into which half a handful of salt is thrown with each scoopshovelful of slack is a good substitute for the foregoing.

Manner of Feeding Grain.—The manner in which grain is supplied is of great importance.

A brood sow should never be fed in such a way that she can satisfy her hunger in a few minutes and then lie down till she is fed again.

Vigorous swine are not developed in an environment where their living comes too easy.

Feed should be so supplied that brood sows will have to hunt for it all day in order to get sufficient nourishment to satisfy their appetites for the night.

The exercise that a brood sow is forced to take and the vigor that she develops while hunting food, tend to impart alertness and activity to her offspring.

A good method is to supply brood sows with whole oats thrown broadcast (not in small piles) on the floor of the enclosure during cold weather, at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. By nightfall they will be fairly well satisfied and remain in their nests till morning. At daybreak give each sow about one gallon of warm water, into which a pint of ground oats is thrown. This will induce her to leave her nest and the warm drink will counteract the sense of cold, while the small amount of grain given will stimulate her appetite and induce her to hunt for the grain she failed to find the evening before.

In mild weather a few roots, such as mangels, turnips or swedes, should be supplied.

Housing.—It is of the utmost importance that the sleeping quarters should be clean, warm and dry.

Expensive quarters are not necessary. A house built of logs, slabs, baled straw or boards, after the following design, answers all purposes and is within the ability of the poorest settler to build:

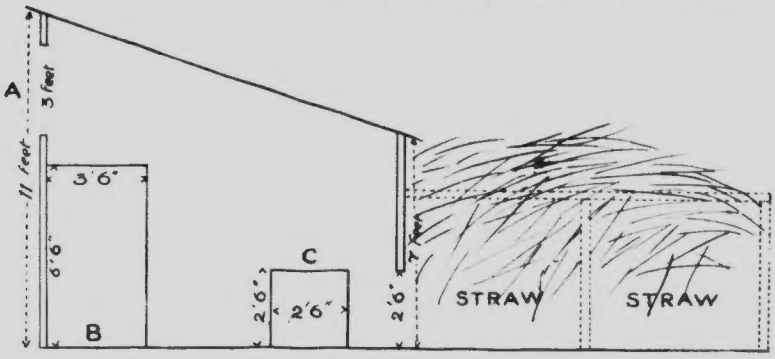

FIG. 1

Fig. 1 shows the end view of a simple wintering pen and feeding floor that may be constructed of lumber, logs or bales of straw.

A shows an opening which extends across the whole length of the front of the building, and is covered with heavy cotton or burlap. This is for ventilation. B shows an entrance door to the feed passage; C a door for pigs. At the rear is shown another door giving access to a pile of wheat or oat straw, in which the sows can make their winter bed. Under no circumstance should barley straw be used. The height of the building given is merely suggestive. The doors for the pigs should swing from the top and should be open during the winter in order to permit the pigs to pass freely into the straw pile. The opening between the feeding floor and the straw pile need not extend the whole length of the building, but it should not be less than 6 feet wide or the sows might injure one another by crowding.

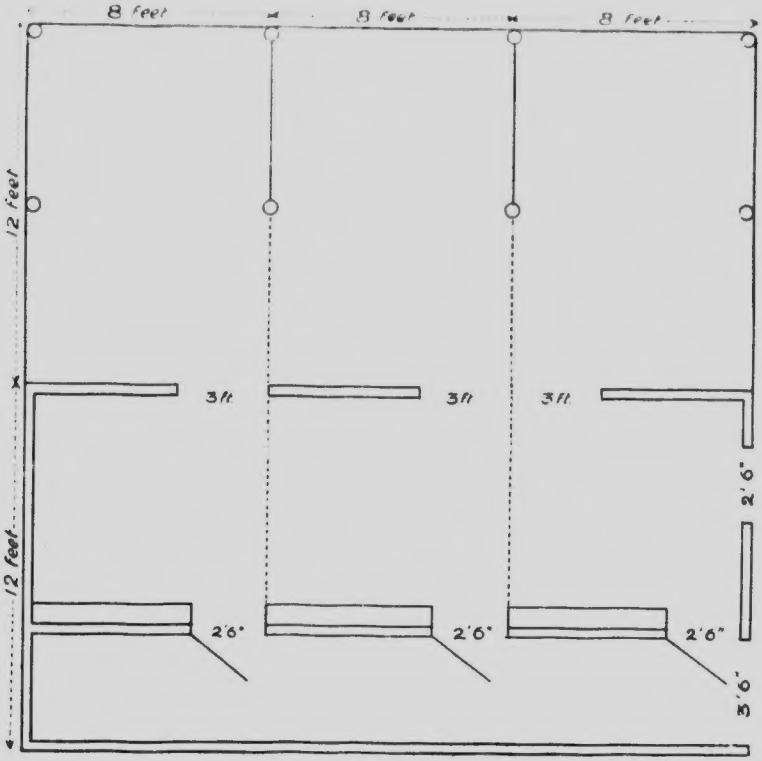

FIG. 2

Fig. 2 shows the floor plan of such a house. The house or feeding pen is shown in double lines and the permanent fence around the yard outside in which the straw is piled is shown by a single line. This building may easily be converted into a farrowing pen by installing movable partitions, as shown by the dotted lines. These can be removed when the pigs are ready to wean.

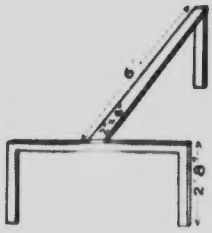

FIG. 3

Fig. 3 shows three posts with plank to be set over the door leading from the feeding floor to the straw pile. Some such contrivance will facilitate the pigs making an entrance to the straw pile. When the warm weather comes the straw can be taken away, also this rack if necessary, and the regular doors to the pens dropped for the summer.

During winter it is preferable to let sows run together, throwing their feed (whole oats) broadcast on the floor during cold weather and on the ground out of doors during warm weather.

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